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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

(for the period from 20 July 1995 to 22 January 1996)

Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of Security Council resolution 1006 (1995) of 28 July 1995, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 1996. It covers developments since my last report of 19 July 1995 (S/1995/595).

Situation in the area of operation

2. During the last six months, hostilities continued in south Lebanon between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and its local Lebanese auxiliary, the de facto forces (DFF), on the one hand, and armed elements who have proclaimed their resistance against the Israeli occupation on the other. UNIFIL continued its efforts to limit the conflict and to protect the inhabitants from the fighting. Through its network of checkpoints and observation posts and an active programme of patrolling, the Force did its best to prevent its area from being used for hostile activities. It also deployed as necessary to provide a measure of protection to the villages and to farmers working in the fields.

Hostilities

3. UNIFIL observed 118 operations by armed elements against IDF/DFF (12 in the latter part of July, 18 in August, 14 in September, 18 in October, 27 in November, 18 in December 1995 and 11 in the first half of January 1996) as compared to 129 in the previous period. There were also numerous reports of attacks against IDF/DFF positions north of the Litani river, bringing the total number of operations to over 350. Most attacks were carried out by a group known as the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of the Shiite Muslim Hizbullah organization. The Shiite movement AMAL increased its attacks against IDF/DFF. Palestinian factions were responsible for a small number of attacks.

In their operations, the armed elements employed small arms, roadside bombs, rockets, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank missiles. Armed elements fired a total of around 1,000 mortar rounds, rockets and anti-tank missiles.

4. IDF/DFF continued their own attacks and retaliatory firing against armed elements, employing artillery, mortars, tanks and aircraft. UNIFIL recorded more than 20,000 artillery, mortar and tank rounds fired by IDF/DFF, as compared to 16,500 in the previous period. IDF increased its patrolling, including long-range ambush patrols outside the Israeli-controlled area (ICA). The use of assault helicopters for both reconnaissance and combat support increased. From early November to early December, two Israeli batteries of 175-millimetre artillery guns near Marjayoun fired more than 5,000 high explosive rounds to targets north of the area of operation of UNIFIL. This sustained shelling, whose purpose has remained unclear, appears not to have resulted in serious casualties or damage; however, it kept tension at a high level. UNIFIL raised this shelling with the Israeli authorities, with a view to having it stopped.

5. As before, Israeli naval vessels patrolled Lebanese territorial waters in the south and imposed restrictions on the local fishermen. At times, this involved firing at or near fishing boats and temporary detention of Lebanese fishermen. UNIFIL intervened with the Israeli authorities repeatedly for the release of those detained.

6. During the reporting period, the targeting of civilians decreased. UNIFIL confirmed one civilian fatality from IDF fire (see subparagraph (b)). There were two instances of firing by armed elements into Israel, drawing Israeli retaliation:

(a) On 28 November, approximately 15 rockets were fired towards Israel. Unlike other occasions, there was no specific cause for that firing. A few hours later, an Islamic Resistance official was killed in south Lebanon when his booby-trapped car exploded. Subsequently, some 20 rockets were fired by the Islamic Resistance towards Qiryat Shemona and also to areas north of Nahariya. A few Israeli civilians suffered light injuries, mainly from shock. In retaliation, IDF/DFF fired more than 600 artillery, tank and mortar rounds, causing minor material damage. There were also several attacks by Israeli jets and helicopters in and north of UNIFIL's area of operation. Later in the day, Hizbullah issued a communiqué listing a number of grievances, including the prolonged shelling, air attacks, the blockade of Lebanese fishermen and the demolition of houses in Bayt Yahun (see below), as the cause for its initial rocket salvo;

(b) On 29 December, the Islamic Resistance fired mortars to an IDF/DFF position at Al Qantarah. IDF retaliated with tank and artillery fire, using fléchette antipersonnel munitions. One civilian was killed, four others were wounded and some houses in the village of Qabrikha were damaged. Several hours later, two salvos of rockets were fired into Israel, impacting around Qiryat Shemona and causing material damage.

Firing at UNIFIL

7. There were 45 instances of firing at or close to UNIFIL positions and personnel by armed elements, mainly during exchanges of fire with IDF/DFF. Such firings were reported to the Lebanese Army and, where possible, protested to the leadership of the groups involved.

8. There were 139 instances of firing at or close to UNIFIL personnel and positions by IDF/DFF. These instances generally took place during exchanges of fire with armed elements. In such an incident, on 30 October, three Israeli artillery rounds landed in or close to the Irish battalion headquarters. In some cases, UNIFIL positions received small arms or machine-gun fire for no apparent reason. All such firings were protested to the Israeli authorities. A very serious incident occurred on 10 December, when a foot patrol of the Norwegian battalion near the village of Blat came under fire from Israeli tanks using fléchette antipersonnel shells. Fortunately, they caused only light injuries to three of the soldiers. The Israeli authorities have apologized for this incident, which occurred despite the fact that IDF knew that UNIFIL personnel were moving in the target area. The IDF investigation, the findings of which were communicated to UNIFIL, indicated that the firing resulted from mistakes by Israeli personnel. Recalling a similar incident in the same area in December 1993, in which a Norwegian soldier was killed and another seriously injured by Israeli fire, the United Nations has asked the Israeli authorities to take effective measures, including disciplinary measures commensurate with the seriousness of the incident.

Israeli-controlled area (ICA)

9. Within the ICA, Israel also maintained a civil administration and security service. Movement between the ICA and the rest of Lebanon was strictly controlled; crossing points were closed frequently, in one case for two months, causing difficulties for the inhabitants. The ICA remained economically dependent on Israel, and an estimated 3,000 of its inhabitants held jobs in Israel; access to such jobs was controlled by DFF and the security services. There were again reports of forced recruitment into DFF. During the reporting period, work arranged by the Lebanese authorities to maintain the infrastructure in the ICA was stepped up, especially the improvement of roads.

10. During the month of November, IDF/DFF demolished around 20 civilian houses in Bayt Yahun village, located in the ICA where it overlaps with the Irish battalion sector. The occupants of the destroyed houses, generally elderly people left behind to care for the properties, were compelled to vacate their homes at short notice, and in some cases houses were demolished with personal effects still in them. Those who were thus made homeless sought shelter in abandoned buildings in other parts of the village, where they live under very difficult conditions, in some cases sharing their quarters with livestock. UNIFIL has protested this matter to the Israeli authorities.

11. Since November, a few families living in Rshaf, near the south-western corner of the Irish battalion sector, have been forced by IDF/DFF to spend the nights in abandoned houses near an IDF/DFF position in another part of the village, evidently to shield that position from attacks. After consulting with

the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNIFIL raised this matter with the Israeli authorities, with a view to having them end this practice, which is in contravention of international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian assistance

12. UNIFIL continued to extend humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in the form of medical care, essential supplies and engineering work and repairs to buildings damaged as a result of hostilities. UNIFIL personnel also escorted farmers so that they could work their fields that are within range of IDF/DFF positions and assisted in putting out fires set off by firing by IDF/DFF. UNIFIL battalion medical centres and mobile teams continued to provide care to civilians at a rate of 2,500 patients per month. Specific humanitarian projects were implemented using resources made available by troop-contributing Governments. UNIFIL helped to distribute educational equipment provided by UNICEF and assisted the United Nations Development Programme in its south Lebanon emergency rehabilitation programme. The Force cooperated closely on these matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies and programmes operating in Lebanon, ICRC and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

13. As in the past, UNIFIL detonated mines, roadside bombs and unexploded remnants of war and dismantled ordnance of various types in the area of deployment. A total of 100 such controlled explosions were carried out.

Organizational matters

14. As of January 1996, UNIFIL comprised 4,649 troops, from Fiji (591), Finland (509), France (249), Ghana (672), Ireland (631), Italy (44), Nepal (669), Norway (748) and Poland (536). In addition, UNIFIL employed 561 civilian staff, of whom 134 were recruited internationally and 427 locally. The deployment of UNIFIL is shown on the annexed map. Major-General Stanislaw F. Woźniak of Poland continued as Force Commander.

15. UNIFIL was assisted in the performance of its tasks by 57 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). These unarmed officers are organized as Observer Group Lebanon and are under the operational control of UNIFIL. They man five observation posts along the Lebanese side of the Israel-Lebanon armistice demarcation line. They also operate five mobile teams in the ICA.

16. The streamlining of UNIFIL, with which the Security Council concurred in resolution 1006 (1995), is well under way and should be completed by May 1996. The guiding principle in this effort remains to maintain the operational effectiveness of the Force and to achieve savings by rationalizing administrative and support services. UNIFIL will continue its efforts to achieve further economies in those areas.

17. The withdrawal of the Norwegian Maintenance Company will be completed by May 1996. I have accepted with appreciation the offer of the Government of Poland to provide a replacement.

18. I regret to report that a Polish soldier died of natural causes and three Norwegian soldiers were wounded as a result of firing. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 205 members of the Force have died: 76 as a result of firing or bomb explosions, 84 in accidents and 45 from other causes. A total of 317 have been wounded by firing or by mine or bomb explosions.

19. In my previous report, I mentioned that the Lebanese authorities had begun to pay rent to owners of land and property used by UNIFIL. However, not all owners have received payment and there is continuing controversy over the lists of owners, prepared by the Lebanese authorities. It is hoped that this problem will soon be resolved.

20. UNIFIL maintained close contacts with the Lebanese authorities on matters of mutual concern. Those authorities provided valuable assistance in connection with the rotation of troops and logistic activities in Beirut. The Lebanese army was helpful in defusing confrontations with armed elements. It also provided accommodation for some UNIFIL contingents while on leave in Lebanon. The Force continued to cooperate with the Lebanese internal security forces on matters pertaining to the maintenance of law and order. In December 1995, Lebanon and the United Nations concluded a status-of-the-Force agreement in respect of UNIFIL.

Financial aspects

21. By its resolution 50/89 of 19 December 1995, the General Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for the Force at a rate not to exceed $10,774,800 gross per month for a period of up to six months from 1 February 1996 to June 1996, should the Security Council decide to extend the Force's mandate beyond 31 January 1996. This authorization is based on a phased implementation of the streamlining of the Force (see paragraph 16 above) and a continuation of its existing responsibilities. Appropriate financial provisions will be sought from the General Assembly at its resumed fiftieth session in respect of the period after 30 June 1996, should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond that date.

22. As of 31 December 1995, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNIFIL Special Account amounted to $203.5 million. The total unpaid assessed contributions for all peace-keeping operations at that date amounted to $1.7 billion.

Observations

23. The situation in southern Lebanon has remained essentially unchanged and continued to be tense and volatile. Israel maintained its occupation of parts of south Lebanon, where the Israeli forces and their local auxiliary continued to be targets of attacks by groups that have proclaimed their resistance to the occupation. UNIFIL's mandate, contained in Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and reaffirmed by subsequent resolutions, remained unfulfilled.

24. Lebanon's position is described in a letter that the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to me on

17 January 1996 (S/1996/34). In the same letter, the Permanent Representative informed me of his Government's decision to request the Security Council to extend UNIFIL's mandate for a further period of six months.

25. Israel outlined its position with regard to the situation in southern Lebanon in a letter that the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to me on 1 August 1994 (S/1994/915) and confirmed in a letter of 18 January 1995 (S/1995/58).

26. In previous reports, I expressed concern at the targeting of civilians and the attendant loss of life. During the last six months, these incidents decreased. I urge the parties to continue to exercise restraint, with a view to ending this practice altogether. I am bearing in mind the risk of escalation, which remains high in a situation where the actions of the parties on the ground are influenced by local dynamics as well as strategic considerations.

27. Although there has been no progress towards the implementation of the mandate of UNIFIL, the Force's contribution to stability in the area and the protection it is able to afford the inhabitants remain important. I therefore recommend that the Security Council accept the Lebanese Government's request and extend the mandate of UNIFIL for another period of six months, that is, until 31 July 1996.

28. In this connection, I should like to recall that UNIFIL, like other peace-keeping operations, is not an end in itself but should be viewed in the context of the broader objective of achieving a durable peace. At the time of reporting, renewed negotiations are under way between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in the framework of the Middle East peace process. These negotiations deserve every encouragement and support, and it is to be hoped that they will quickly lead to tangible results. It is equally to be hoped that progress will be made soon towards resolving the situation in the Israel-Lebanon theatre as well.

29. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to some $203.5 million. This represents money owed to Member States that contribute the troops who make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force, in particular those of developing countries, for their understanding and patience in these difficult circumstances.

30. In my previous report, I referred to the fate of two Palestinians who, on 16 April 1995, after their release from prison, were deported to Lebanon by the Israeli authorities. They were denied entry by the Lebanese authorities and turned to UNIFIL for assistance. Since 18 April 1995, the two men have been accommodated at UNIFIL headquarters. Efforts to arrange passage to a country or territory that would be willing to accept them have so far not been successful. I call upon the parties concerned to find a solution to this humanitarian problem.

31. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major-General Stanislaw F. Woźniak, the Force Commander, and to all the men and women under his command for the manner in which they have carried out their difficult and often dangerous task. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, on their countries and on the United Nations.